

CHARLOTTE MASON COLLEGE
AMBLESIDE

**EXAMINATIONS
IN THE
PARENTS' UNION SCHOOL**

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THE PARENTS' UNION SCHOOL

BY THE CHIEF EXAMINER

The following account is intended first to introduce the broad theory ; then to show it at work ; and in conclusion to emphasise the significance of so personal and humanistic an approach to education in view of the modern danger of losing the individual in the mass.

PERSON

I. PRINCIPLES

First in Charlotte Mason's mind, and heart, came insistence upon the *Person* in each child, however young. To her this was sacred, and the real self was never to be offended in its integrity. It followed that each young person was to be invited and enabled to develop, as a flower unfolds, according to his nature; yet with such direction as would fit him for his work in life. Teachers and parents are indeed strongly urged to think about the all-round person in each child, and to comment upon his development in school and out.

RELEVANCE

This main purpose of education leads to the second great principle—that of *Relevance*. Prizes and penalties, together with personal likes and dislikes, are all irrelevant to *the subject in hand*; whether it be the study of a plant or picture, or of an episode in history, or of a mathematical process, or of a straight bat in cricket. True learning is a natural food which the growing child will take up and assimilate and never lose.

NARRATION

Never lose—that brings me to the third point, the *telling-back* of whatever has been studied in class or in the field. Others have stressed the importance of a child's personality, and the need for relevance is self-evident—despite the wide use still of marks and rewards and punishments: but the Parents' Union School is unique in its strong insistence on the *narration* by the child of facts and thoughts just put before him, for then they will be never lost; not stored in his memory, but part of him.

This method of assimilation belongs closely to the emphasis that the great psychologist, Professor William James, put on *doing something about* a fresh living experience—'if it is only giving up your seat in a bus on your way home from a fine concert,' he said. Or you would tell some friend about it eagerly.

A youngster, John, I once met (on paper) had been deeply moved by the death of Harold at Hastings, and he told it back vividly, ending upon a sigh with '... poor man!' He had made that story his own in the telling of it back, and it would stay with him for good.

Or, again, I recall an essay by a girl of seventeen on 'Sacrifice' in which she came to the judgment that the best service to oneself was to sacrifice the self. It is an old story, that one must lose oneself to find oneself; but Jenny, as she thought about it, did more than repeat verbally what had been discussed in class or in books; as she wrote she was

clearly assimilating it all, making it her own, and she reached *for herself* that profound conclusion.

Does not this link on closely to Charlotte Mason's devotion to person? Both John and Jenny spoke from their real selves.

You can see it again in the way the grasp of the Earth's motion, of an animal's life, of a picture seen, take their place quite naturally in the mind of the child who has quietly attended to them, and assimilated them by *telling them back* in his own words.

REMARKS

A point of procedure which Miss Mason long wanted and which has now been adopted was that numerical marks should be abolished. She said:

'We feel it desirable to obviate *examination marks* altogether; but it is necessary that parents should have some means of judging whether their children are or are not making satisfactory progress, and this information is best given by means of marks which represent, not a numerical value, but a remark, such as "good", "fair", "excellent", etc.

'No class lists *in order of merit* are published or kept. The marks assigned to a scholar for any set of papers show whether he is above or below the average for his age and form, but have no relative place value. But in order that there may be no undue pressure on the part of the scholar to obtain marks to the neglect of interest in knowledge, the maximum marks are given, not to the best papers, but to papers showing *quite satisfactory progress* for the age and form of the pupil.'

These ideas are now embodied in *remarks* without any figures, actually more explicit than the single words she suggested: and the examiner sums up the papers as a whole with a general comment at the end.

THINGS AND BOOKS

Lastly there are Miss Mason's views on the use of *things* and *books*. She wanted immediate contact with things themselves, on the one hand, with nature, pencil or brush, needle or a tool; and, on the other hand, with the minds of great writers. All these interests are provided for by the P.U.S. programme; and there is a special concern about the right books, though these have been so difficult to get after the two wars.

The books she insisted on were those of authors whose knowledge and enthusiasm make their truth live, and give them the power to pass it on in language clear and impressively interesting. She pleaded that we should let such master-teachers link the young learner to the subject directly, and ourselves stand on one side — like good gardeners who know that plants must do their own growing, in the conditions they need. Yet she was ever in the right line from such wise men as à Kempis and knew that book-learning is but one form of experience, only one way among others to judgment and living growth. 'Things', in the widest sense, creatively used, serve to give the personality the needed conditions for growth no less than books.

AT HEADQUARTERS

II. PRACTICE

The administration of all the work of the School has various sides. There is the introduction of enquirers, from homes or schools, to the

system as a whole. There is the close watch over each child individually and his or her development from term to term, in mind and body — and one might well add in spirit, for parents and teachers are expected to report on such matters as responsibility, help in the home, and leadership in the school.

Books

As to the bookwork, great pains are taken to carry out Charlotte Mason's ideals, despite difficulties. When books go out of print (precious ones like the Buckley Science series) new ones have to be found and tested over a period, and adopted or rejected.

Programmes

The programmes for the coming term must be worked out with the greatest care. The setting of the questions for the six forms illustrates particularly well the organic relationship of the three branches, administration, teaching and examining. After each examination the Director and members of Headquarters who are concerned review the detailed reports of examiners as to the success or failure of a given question or book; and the Chief Examiner sends in a General Report on the examination as a whole. There are also some Special Reports on schools which have arranged to have them. All this enables the programme-setters to adjust questions and books for the next term. There is no hackneyed fixed procedure: it is live and flexible all the time.

Finally, the Director and various specialists go through all the papers as they come in from the examiners. This leads to many letters of advice and actual visits to homes and schools which seem to need help.

THE TEACHING

It might be said that here in the actual class-work is the most important part of the whole—true: but it is the aim all the while not to let teachers feel in the least isolated. Headquarters and examiners are constantly engaged in helping those who actually meet the children in or out of the class-room.

Bridge-makers

To the ancient Romans the supreme link between God and man was their Pontifex, the *bridge-maker*. Charlotte Mason strove to make all of us bridge-makers between the divinity of true knowledge and of human personality and our children's minds. That is the essential function of teaching. Here, let us say, is the Pythagorean theorem in geometry, clear in the teacher's mind, and he is to get it across to the class; not indeed by any *pons asinorum*, but by a bridge of intelligent interest linking the two sides. Or, in Form I, it could be just leading young John across to the noble pathos of Harold and his defeat.

How is this bridging to be done? To return to the Mason principles, there must be *relevance to the subject* all the time, with no interposing of the teacher's personality to distract. And, supplementary to that, there is to be respect for the integrity of each separate person in the class—to that end how much better it would be to break from tradition and put the weak ones, who most need help, in the front seats!

There is to be the best book obtainable, and if it is a narrative subject, such as History or Literature, it is to be read quietly and told back afterwards as I have described in giving the principle of narration. For this Miss Mason required three things in the class especially—*confidence*, quiet *attention* without distracting and irrelevant motives, and the pupil's own active *response*. Given these conditions the story or description will stay in the child's mind for good. No revision is needed, or ever used, in P.U.S. work. Nor does a term's work end with the term; it is there still long after. Perhaps some Sixth Form girl's essay discussing a novel will use a parallel from, say, the drama of 'Ruth', or some nature-walk, or piece of music, once described in a narration of years back. It is still there, part of herself for good.

'Disciplinaries'

But what of the hard subjects, it will be asked, the 'disciplinary' ones, as they are called? How can one apply narration to geometry or multiplication or Latin syntax? Of course you can't: but the point of the telling-back was to *do something about* the new mental experience. And if the pupil can prove that theorem with a figure on paper or at the board, then, as surely as in re-telling a history event, the work is assimilated and made his own.

There are, however, many slow by nature to grasp mathematics or grammar—what is the teacher to do about them? Keep the work *relevant*, suited to the child's power of understanding. Give him a programme easier than that of his Form; easy enough for the confidence to return which Miss Mason wanted, and give him a sense of mastery—and, no doubt, with it the assurance that this teacher can teach after all! Or let the French *Dictée* chosen be easy enough for some to get it all right, and none to feel defeated and silly; for that is to offend against their integrity.

Counsels of perfection? Yes, to be sure: and that is the way one does advance.

Whole Person

Lastly, the teacher is going to pass on the child to an examiner: let it be the whole child. As he opens the papers let him see first (in the *Remarks* on N.2) a few lines of sympathetic description of the young person being introduced to him. This means a little extra trouble, but it can be very rewarding to the parent or teacher to have to pause and look at all sides of the child—at interests and responsibilities that compensate, perhaps, for poor bookwork; and to be glad after all that he is not the exasperating failure he sometimes seems to be.

EXAMINING

So I come to the third branch, that of examining the term's work sent in on paper. The P.U.S. examiners are on a different footing from those who handle the ordinary public examinations. Such are not concerned at all with anything but the written answers before them; but we work in close relation with Headquarters and the teachers or parents. That *vignette* of the child as a person which comes with the papers is going to influence the examiner's comments. 'Susan was in bed for half the examination,' he is told—the comment on her will not stress the weakness in her work, but rather commend her good effort. Or, it is

reported that George Davies has made a fine Form-prefect, or he has a good piece of garden of his own — is he to be disheartened by a too exacting comment on his weak bookwork? There might rather be something to help him, quite simple, such as 'George Davies is evidently stronger out of school than in'—that way he keeps his integrity, and gets his right value as a whole person.

Yet these examples are but a meagre way to express what the parent's or teacher's introduction of a child can mean to an examiner. It begins to have the flavour of a momentary personal interview; the writer of the papers on his desk comes alive.

The Questions Set

Then there is also the guidance which examiners can give to the setters of the questions at Headquarters, to which I have already referred. For example, the mere repetition of 'Fair' or 'Poor' throughout a Form's work on some question is itself an indication that either the book, or the question set, or the teacher has failed.

There are, too, those Special Reports on whole schools which pass through Headquarters and afford further guidance as to how the work is going.

Not Against the Book

We do not estimate the papers sent in against the book, as in so many other examinations; but against the work of many hundreds of children doing the same programme. *Vox populi, vox dei*—one might say. If the majority of children fail on a given question, that is final—it was too hard, or the book was poor, or poorly used. Failure is so rare: not to get the *point* at least, even if meagrely told sometimes, is to fall below the P.U.S. threshold; and if many do, something is wrong.

One hundred per cent

Also, following Charlotte Mason's principle again, the examiners are not shy of giving full marks, i.e. 'Excellent'. Others, too, have endorsed her point: the distinguished Headmaster, Sir Cyril Norwood, once told the Assistant Masters' Association:

'I want to see a school examination so constructed that our good boys and girls will regularly get 100 per cent. on all the papers . . . I want to see a pass standard of something like 70 per cent . . . so that our pupils can get the sense that they are learning something, learning to do something and proving it, and not have the feeling that they are brought up against an almost insuperable barrier because they have to do papers which are set by the examiners purely for testing the abler candidates.'

And again an enlightened report on the old School Certificate Examination said:

'The adoption of this principle of "easy papers and a high standard of marking" does not involve any lowering of the standard of the examination: what it does mean is that the standard will be a real one and not a false standard, and will reach out to every child, not only the clever ones.'

(H.M.S.O., 1931; par: 48)

Every child — would those, Principals and others, who find the P.U.S. values too generous, take fresh heart from those quotations?

Some are worried to find their pupils getting lower values in a public examination, especially the G.C.E., than we give: but it is a choice of methods. One might almost say that Miss Mason and other advanced educationists would have us look for the *good* in the weaker ones and encourage them.

It is in fact found that the ordinary P.U.S. work serves well at the preparatory school level as a training for the Common Entrance Examination. For the General Certificate Examination some necessary modification of the ordinary programme is provided by Headquarters, for Form V particularly.

Flexibility

Then again examiners here are not bound by the exigencies of competition—no prize or job hangs upon the precision of their valuing. Hence there is a flexibility and absence of strain in their task, which leads to a far truer estimate of the living person being judged than the more rigid way could ever afford. This appears in the practice we have developed of extending those simple words, 'Good', 'Fair', 'Poor', etc. A public examiner who gives 70 per cent. for some paper may have reached that figure by combining, say, 30 for accuracy, 25 for detail, 15 for style. In such a case we should stop at the words which the 70 per cent. represents, and say, perhaps—'A full and careful report; English rather weak', without any figure at all.

Examiner at Work

Shall I give a little account of the actual examining? Some uneasy teacher might protest that when an examiner sits down to a thousand sets of papers, his judgment of *relative* values (on which the Mason method especially rests) may be growing sound after the first hundred or so, indeed; but what of the early ones? Such a difficulty could assuredly apply to a new examiner beginning this kind of valuing, yet it would be mitigated much by guidance from an experienced trainer—and, of course, it happens in public examinations, too, errors being adjusted by a Board; as they are here by supervision from Headquarters.

Presently, though, the memory of previous sessions, and the constant stream of late-comers from abroad, serve to keep the standards of valuing continuous and flexibly relative. Nevertheless it remains true that judgment does actually grow more assured as the first hundred wears on; and possibly to review that hundred at a later stage might a little modify some of the valuation. But against this has to be set the point that in any such revision something of the *fresh sweep*, the sub-conscious *feeling* for values, would be lost. The experienced examiner himself has his mind set at ease on this score by finding that to take any set of papers at random and re-value it, without looking at the first report sheet, does actually result in a very close correspondence between the two markings.

There is in fact a rhythm in the swift but unhurried survey of the papers before one that gives a living precision, which more meticulous and laboured estimates cannot achieve. Moreover it is a different kind of precision. It is the experience of most examiners elsewhere that they cautiously keep well below the maximum lest other papers come along better than the best so far. Charlotte Mason urged us not to press for

such intense competition: 'Excellent' means the paper is good and the work done as it should be, not necessarily the best or a book-perfect one. For instance, I have often given 'Excellent' for a French paper from Form II which has a word or two wrongly spelt: for one knows that spelling is a reasonable difficulty at that age, and the child doubtless speaks the language better than he writes it. He has done well, and if another comes along word-perfect he too will get 'Excellent'.

May I, to reinforce that point, stress once more that the P.U.S. examiners do not evaluate against the book, but against the standard set by very many children doing the same work under varying conditions? One might add that this standard would probably be found statistically at 75 per cent., or even more, for these two reasons: firstly, the children are, as I say, not being estimated against a book perfection—and secondly, because of the characteristic atmosphere in the reading and telling-back of confidence, and of attention undistracted by irrelevant mark-chasing, or personal likes and dislikes, hopes and fears, and the rest. There is a warm feeling in the class but not of that sort; it is the eagerness that belongs to a well-told story, or to the mastery of some point of syntax or of science.

CONCLUSION

My own concluding thought is of the *quality* offered here. Competitive examinations beset us more and more today, and tend to submerge in a kind of mass-education those personal values that Miss Mason so earnestly wanted. The book must be of the best, she said: and then it must be assimilated by each child in conditions of confidence and quiet attention as it is read and told back. That is true *relevance* both to the subject and to the young person taking it; there is a danger that this may be lost in an excess of competition.

I wish those who suspect that the way of live interest is but the easy way in education could see the Sixth Form essays from one of our larger schools. I have lately reported on sixty or seventy from one school (most of the fourteen girls offering five essays each), and almost every one showed the personality of the writer, her real self, together with the hard work put in and power of expressing it despite their varying ability. Other schools outside our field could show similar strength in their Sixth Form work, and more scholarships no doubt—the pupils have usually been selected and trained to that end. But here, in these essays I reviewed, you have a natural flowering of a plant grown wholesomely right up from its roots in Form I. Modern pressure does indeed require some special attention in our Form V for the G.C.E.: but in this Sixth Form work we are back in the natural serenity and happiness of self-fulfilment, which belong to Charlotte Mason's ideals.

Given the courage to face dull work faithfully, and so to stiffen the warm eagerness of narration, then the whole personality of each child will find itself and the range of his ability be fully opened up. The quality will be achieved which can redeem our democratic education from the danger of mediocrity; and save the individual from that submergence in the mass which threatens today.

CONFIDENCES OF AN EXAMINER

by G.H.A.S.

We P.U.S. examiners express our reactions to a child's efforts at expression in a brief comment. These are listed on the report form N.1 under the title of 'Scale of remarks'. Sometimes it will be observed that we allow ourselves to say a little more. For example the remark 'Good' may be followed by the statement that the work is 'clear but short'. From this it is hoped that the examinee will make the correct assumption that had he written more in the same vein he would have qualified for the comment 'Very Good' or 'Excellent'. Each examiner tends to assemble and use an assortment of these secondary comments; the aim of them is not greater accuracy in assessment, which is not part of the P.U.S. scheme of things at all, but at greater co-operation between examiner, teacher and pupil, which is very much part of our policy.

These secondary comments are themselves brief, and this article is written in an attempt to explain and expand their implications.

Very often the comments are negative in form, as criticism so often must be, but in every case they imply a constructive and positive suggestion. They are meant to indicate the lack of some important quality in the child's work. If, therefore, we can establish what these qualities are, then we shall at all events see the end of the road, however much, through the weakness of our children's mortal nature, they may still deviate on the way.

Careful analysis, guided by the Charlotte Mason philosophy, reveals five such qualities. They are, relevance, accuracy, integration, significance and economy. These five names may suggest rather a formidable standard, but we shall see that the things they stand for are really quite simple. The order is, as a whole, unimportant. They are set out in this particular order, because their first letters thus give us the mnemonic RAISE, and surely no one will mind the examiner having his fun!

But our first consideration must always be RELEVANCE, no matter what comes after. And this in P.U.S. work has a special meaning. In any examination it is obviously silly to tell the examiner what he does not want to know, and has not asked for. But there is more to it than this. Relevance implies not only knowledge, but judgment. The mind, and not the memory only, is involved. To be relevant is to be in the service of Truth, which means that a moral as well as a mental element is engaged in this business of education.

This is not altogether new. Our very word 'candidate' (*candidus* = white) enshrines the memory of the white-robed aspirants for office, and so may suggest to us the preparation, the purification, the discipline, the honest work involved in our candidature. Every real examination is a test not of our memories, but of ourselves, of our whole response to a problem. We are not reporters, but judges.

This may seem far-fetched in relation to younger children, but it is not really. A child of three will pass judgment in the face of an adult.

Mother says: 'John, I said "No".' and back will come the response: 'But, I said "Yes"!'. It would be wrong, usually, to let John get away with it, but the fact remains that John in his babyhood, *contra mundum*, is asserting an opinion, making a judgment, emerging into true humanhood.

This element of judgment is always present in P.U.S. examinations. The P.U.S. child is not to be catechised or asked questions. He is not to be given an outline answer. He is to put in what he likes, and leave out what he likes, and stop when he likes. It is John or Mary that the examiner wants to meet, not their parents or teachers. As in teaching Charlotte Mason insisted that the teacher should stand aside, so also in examination the child should be left free. Only so can this important test of relevance be applied.

Even the little ones? Yes, especially the little ones. They indeed rarely fail in relevance. They are the typical 'pure in heart,' the single-minded. They see the thing in the round, and react whole-heartedly to the situation, from the first, 'Well,' to the triumphant, 'and that's the end.'

With older children their very eagerness is sometimes their undoing, and so the disappointing comment comes, 'Read the question,' or 'Keep to the point.' And whereas the little ones are expected to give the whole story, the older ones have to learn more and more to select and arrange, and so, with them, relevance implies a deliberate and conscious choice. Supposing, in Geography, a map of the north-eastern states of the U.S.A. is asked for and a child draws a map of the whole of North America, the effort will be rejected, not because it is wrong—it may be a very good map—but it is not relevant, 'not as set' as we say. There has been a failure of attention or care. The judge has tried the wrong case. In narration subjects the position is often more complicated, but in every case the test of relevance will apply, and in time, a similar privilege of choice will be exercised in the form of expression. To find the *mot juste* will become as much an exercise in relevance as the choice of subject-matter from Form IV onward.

The test of relevance shows our examinations as involving the exercise of this wonderful and subtle power of choice, and makes them much more important than memory tests.

Next on our list is ACCURACY. We have seen that a statement may be accurate but irrelevant. If a man wants to go to a Post Office, it is of no use to direct him to a railway station. But it is still possible to direct him wrongly to the Post Office. In other words, a statement may be relevant, but inaccurate. This sort of thing in examinations produces a crop of such comments as 'muddled,' 'astray,' 'not sure.'

When the P.U.S. method has established itself, inaccuracy is exceptional, though sometimes it will afflict a whole form like a plague. The following instance is exceptional, both in the school concerned, and in our work as a whole. A girl in Form IIIB expressed the opinion that the Ballot Act was 'rather silly because it was done in secret, but after a little while they were discovered.' This can only mean inattention, because it misses the whole point of the Act, although the significant detail of secrecy is remembered.

Sometimes, in a commendable effort to make bricks without straw, a child will make the wildest statements, and, by chance, enrich the world with 'schoolboy howlers'. From the examiner's point of view these, although diverting, are unprofitable, and, dull as it may sound, register only as a defect in accuracy. It may be significant that in over twenty years of P.U.S. examining only one or two genuine howlers have come this examiner's way. The child who thought that the reference to an 'Italian band' in the Acts of the Apostles meant that St. Paul's wanderings were enlivened by an orchestra ought, perhaps, not to be entirely forgotten!

Under this heading it must be pointed out that the P.U.S. examiner's comments do not imply a nicely balanced less or more. To grasp a principle is more important than meticulous accuracy in detail. Conversely a single slip may vitiate a whole answer. In Grammar, for example, a child may show by one mistake that the real nature of the subject-predicate principle is not understood, and therefore will appear to receive little credit for some right (and lucky) guesses.

The third quality, INTEGRATION, is more difficult to deal with, although simple enough to understand. It means merely that all our bits of knowledge should be seen to be parts of wholes. A surgeon learns by dissection, but his knowledge is of use only to whole bodies, living men and women. So in school we learn by subjects, by lessons, in bits and pieces, but these should be fitted in, first to their own context, and then later on to the whole human scene as far as we are able to comprehend it. Our comprehension will be less than that, say, of a Wells or Toynbee, but there is no comprehension at all until our bits of knowledge have a time and place, a context assigned to them.

Even the youngest can be encouraged to say when and where things happen, and later on people and events should always be related to their environment. This principle will be readily accepted in historical subjects, and it is clearly the object of Century Books. But in other subjects too, literature, music appreciation, picture study, it is important for the child to see where a life or work belongs.

This integration is especially important in P.U.S. teaching, in which the individual child's personality is valued so highly. The very essence of 'narration' is that the subject should be absorbed and integrated in the child's own mind, that it should become part of the child's life. And this examiner at all events, feels that more could be done to relate the past to the present. To give an example—how rarely does one find that in discussing church problems of the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries the child is aware that he is talking of his own church, the one he goes to on Sundays. And again, municipal and parliamentary events are often discussed as things utterly remote from ordinary life. So let them ask not only 'How?' but again and again, 'When?', 'Where?', and later on 'Why?', because the tidier their knowledge is, the more readily is it available, and the more does it become knowledge rather than information.

And then we have SIGNIFICANCE. A statement, or a story, may be relevant, accurate and in context, and yet not worth spending time and trouble on. It is always so much easier to remember the gossip

oddments used as illustrations, than the facts they illustrate. Sometimes these morsels are remembered to the exclusion of all else, and then the comments 'trivial' or 'superficial' appear. The youngest children tell him an ancient tale, and the examiner will always pretend he is complete ignorance, if not stupidity. 'I'll draw a picture so that they'll understand.' But as we grow up we will come to realise that stories, like expressions, may become 'clichés', their juice and goodness extracted, and the freshness and vigour we look for is lost in secondhand and insignificant detail.

Such mistakes may be called mistakes in perspective or mistakes of focus. But all photographers will know our efforts may be 'insignificant' in other ways. We cannot expect a good picture if our negative is too thin and indistinct through errors of exposure. In case of younger children the weakness is often in the writing, which corresponds to the printing process of the photographer. The picture is there, but it is so hard to get on to the paper, and the comment may be, 'Good, but short', or 'Good so far'. This weakness should have been overcome by the time the child reaches Form IIA, and thereafter short narrations are described as 'thin' or 'meagre' or 'sketchy'. The image is just not there, and we must conclude, never has been there, because things that really become part of our minds, and *significant* to them, are not forgotten. Miss Mason insisted on this element of the permanence of the impressions made by ideas on the child's mind. But these impressions are only permanent if the child accepts them as significant, not on anyone else's authority, by virtue of their own truth, interest and relevance. P.U.S. lessons are carefully graduated according to the child's age, and therefore the examiner concludes that if the picture is not received, there has been a failure in the 'exposure', the significant rays of light have somehow been interrupted in their passage from mind to mind.

And here it may be remarked that these 'interruptions' are not the less undesirable, when they are deliberate and well-meant. Sometimes, in an attempt to help, the teacher will embroider the text with imaginary detail. This frequently occurs in Bible Lessons, and is most undesirable. Here, of all places, the text must take care of itself, lest its own magnificent artistry should be spoilt. The comment 'Keep to the text' explains itself, but it should be realised that a very important principle is at stake when it appears.

Lastly, ECONOMY. This, like significance, becomes more and more important from Form IV onward. Often in Form IV when writing is fluent the child becomes a spendthrift of time, words and ideas. After having been encouraged for years to 'write fully' and 'tell all', he now may have the shock of reading the comment 'too long' against an eager effort, or it may be that having given too much time to one question at the expense of another, the comment is 'ill-balanced'. Well, we shall none of us be heard for our much speaking, and most of us have to learn to practise economy sooner or later in many departments of life. Part of the value of writing verse is that it teaches us this lesson of economy and self-control. Few of us would present ourselves for an interview in

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a physically dishevelled state. Yet that is sometimes what happens to our written work; though perhaps neatly written, it just streams out behind us like a banner in a breeze. As our time is limited it is important that we learn to use it to the best advantage. And remember that the examiner's time is limited, too.

In conclusion we may remark that the five qualities we have been considering are valid, not only in respect of our work, but also of ourselves. We parents and teachers wish our children in themselves to be true to the best that we can teach them. We want to fit them to take their useful place in the world, to be *relevant* to their environment. We want them to be true and honest men and women, with trained and *accurate* minds. We want them to recognise their debt to God and man, to find their vocation in life, to be *integrated* in the various societies and communities to which they belong. We want them to feel, not lost in the mass, but with an individual contribution of the utmost importance and *significance*. And we know that self-control and discipline, personal *economy*, are essential to their full and useful development.

We shall not be surprised at this mental-moral conjunction. Our motto is 'Education is a life'. It is an essential P.U.S. principle that the mind is an instrument of the self, and develops step by step with the whole development of man. If it does not do so there is danger. To-day we are appalled by the possibilities that confront us when man's scientific achievement outstrips his moral development. It is to Miss Mason's eternal credit that she made the essential connection between the two quite clear to educationalists long ago.

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NOTES ON EXAMINATIONS IN THE P.U.S.*

by THE DIRECTOR

At recent conferences the P.U.S. has been considered in a variety of ways planned to provoke general discussion from 'both sides of the counter', so we thought that this time we would change the angle of approach so as to give you an idea of some of the work as we tackle it in the P.U.S. Room at Low Nook in Ambleside, with particular reference to programmes and examinations, so I am going to tell you about some of the thoughts which are in our minds and some of the ways in which we prepare the examinations.

In the setting of the questions, each of us undertakes some part of this work and each of us submits our first efforts to the closest possible scrutiny of at least one other member of the staff. We find 'correcting each others' exercises' a pastime which can be most provocative and even entertaining.

Each form and each subject has a different character and a sense of progress up the school must be as inherent in the questions as in the material set for study. To illustrate this let me refer to one specific examination. I have chosen Number 183, Summer 1952.

Form IB. 'Tell one Bible story you have heard this term from the Old Testament.' This will be dictated to a friendly grown-up and asks only for two things — the child's own choice of a story and the words in which to tell it.

Form IA. 'Tell the story of (a) the first Ascension Day, or (b) the lame man at the Gate Beautiful.' Here the advance is in asking for a specific story and, in Upper IA, where the children's fluency begins to impose a severe strain on the amanuensis, in expecting one or two answers to be self-written and therefore, of necessity, very considerably condensed.

Form IIB. These questions differ very little in character from those of Upper IA, but the children are expected to write all, or nearly all, the answers for themselves, therefore unconsciously their fluency is disciplined and careful economy of words is practised. It is imposing too severe a handicap to require ink-writing (except of course for practice in writing lessons, etc.) at this stage, and the examiners cannot make proper allowances for this handicap. It is quite obvious, with really hardly any exceptions, that a IIB pupil who sends in ink-written examinations would have done better in pencil.

Form IIA. Ink writing is compulsory and good, simple punctuation is essential. A few questions are set which require some marshalling of facts from a number of lessons—for example, *British History*, 'Tell how Henry VII became rich and how he used his money'. In Form II, 'Composition' appears for the first time, but it really takes the place of 'Tales' in Form I and 'Literature' higher up the school, and therefore covers the term's general reading. For this and other reasons,

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purely imaginative questions are rarely included, but (see Programme) during the term Form II *should* have opportunities for original writing; many of them do, of course, as members of the Portfolio of Story and Verse. In this form definite evidence is required of term-time attention to maps and sketch drawings where applicable, particularly in Natural History as a scientific study.

Form III. Here very few questions require a straightforward narration—for instance 'Describe two characters from *The Monastery* or *The Chester Pageant of the Deluge*' or 'Describe carefully *either* (a) distilled water and how it is obtained, *or* (b) the hydrometer and its uses'. Paragraphing is looked for in this form, opportunity is given for original composition (including verse) and Citizenship demands some definite ethical thinking—for example, 'Tell a story about Pompey which shows his ambition for power'. I shall never forget my early attempts to do some question setting under Miss Kitching's guidance when, after several hours of careful reading and planning, I took a set of Citizenship questions to her only to be told, 'My dear, those are history questions, not citizenship!'

Form IV. Once again, as in IA, fluency is in danger of becoming a runaway steed, therefore the questions must be framed to control it (though usually at least one opportunity is given for a straightforward narrative), so we ask, 'Outline the development of government in our country since 1689', or 'Write short accounts or definitions and give examples of (a) dicotyledons, (b) Caryophyllaceae, (c) floral diagram', and occasionally for elementary instances of comparison and analogy. A Form IV set of papers presents the examiners with greater bulk than any other and should show evidence of a very full mind, learning to select what is relevant to the question and therefore not likely to be too much troubled in *Form V* where strict self-discipline is required as a preparation for the General Certificate. Précis is expected, of course, and essay form, and one eye on the clock—because the subjects are too big to deal with at full length in the time available, therefore style must be pruned, format studied and the question valued with a realisation of the exact meaning of its wording, for example, 'Consider some Utopian ideals in the light of modern ways', was a question where, alas, too many enthusiasts devoted all but the last sentence to the first half of the question!

Form VI. How I wish many more of you were familiar with the real thrill of this near-adult work, sometimes part of the preparation for Advanced G.C.E. and sometimes purely an adventure in personal study. If you have seen a set of Form VI examinations and read the forewords, you will have noticed that here we no longer have 'questions' but titles—'The Wise Man of *Ecclesiastes* and *Wisdom*' or 'Man and His Reason' or 'History books I have enjoyed' or 'Some rogues of fiction' or 'Some weather phenomena and their causes'. It often happens that a Form VI pupil wishes to submit an essay on a subject not set on the programme; in this case we are always prepared to include a special title provided proper notice is given, because this work is highly individual and if it is to be real it must meet individual needs: we may get a request for something suitable for a girl who is preparing to become a doctor, or for one who has been reading a particular period of history because she

missed it on her way up the school, or a literary essay in a foreign language.

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You may be thinking that my survey of the questions has been rather one-sided because I have only dealt with what are too often loosely called narration subjects. I have done this deliberately because the more formal mathematics, languages, etc., are tests in the accepted term of the word and differ very little from those in general practice, whereas the literary work exemplifies Miss Mason's principle that an examination question should ask, 'How much do you know about—?'. In answering such a question, the difference between the more and less able pupil lies in quantity of content rather than in the ratio of right and wrong in a set of unrelated queries requiring short factual replies.

There is a very great deal more of interest in this part of our work. I will only bring forward one more aspect of our subject—special members—about which only a limited, though steadily increasing number of our school teachers know. Special membership is an arrangement made through a school by which a pupil is entitled to send in examinations each Christmas *and* summer, receive a personal report on them, and, in addition, be supplied with a copy of programmes and examinations (for the interest of parents and pupil, who will find them full of suggestions for good leisure reading and occupations). This report differs from that of the usual specimen paper report on an independent school or class in that it applies only to that one pupil (as for a home schoolroom pupil), whereas the other is compiled and perhaps commented on as an average specimen of the class and of the result of the work of both pupil and teacher. When a school consists entirely or largely of special member pupils, a general report of the work is available on payment of a fee: this supplements the personal reports and is intended as a guide to the principal and staff and as a basis for discussion (*not* as in any sense a disciplinary measure!). In it strengths and weaknesses are pointed out and continuity of commentary is maintained from one year to another. To give you some idea of the character of such a document I am going to quote from one issued at Christmas, hoping that the school to which it refers will forgive me as I am quoting it quite anonymously.

'The examination was taken by 91 out of the 93 children in the school. The papers were, as usual, assembled and presented excellently. The teachers' comments were careful and revealing, especially with regard to the children's character, and in the life of the school.

'The amount of work covered by the middle forms in the course of the term is very wide, though outside activities, walks, rides and games are evidently not neglected.

'Liveliness and vivacity appear in the narrations together with a quite high standard of ability. Most children appear to have the urge to express themselves in words. In the examination we are concerned with what they express and how they express it.

'And here the P.U.S. standards are quite clear. The formative influence both over ideas and their expression is to be that of the best masters of thought and expression in the language. The children's minds have to be brought into close contact with the highest standards of litera-

tion. The text, therefore, of the books studied is very important, and can usually be left to speak for itself. Glosses, for example, on the Bible narrative, often serve only to divert interest away from what is vital. The comment "keep to the text" is meant to emphasise this point.

Perhaps an illustration may help to make this clear. The children's behaviour and manners will be largely determined by the tradition of the school. Their code will be absorbed, naturally and unconsciously, from what they see around them. The atmosphere of a school is a most potent influence in this respect. So with the child's inner behaviour or thought. The child's mind will live and feed on that by which it is surrounded. Miss Mason was most emphatic on this point as the teachers will know. What the examiner wishes to stress is that this principle is very important, not only as regards content, but as regards form as well. The great minds teach us not only facts and ideas, but order, word economy, assessment of values, an appreciation of what is important or not important, humility of mind, dignity of speech, integrity, indeed all the virtues of that region of man's being in which the mental tends to blend and merge into the moral.

'So "keep to the text" implies much more than a slavish adherence to *ipsissima verba*. The exact words do not matter. What does matter is that the mental activity of a deep and disciplined mind may be shared by us and in time made our own. The P.U.S. examiner is looking for this as soon as the technique of writing is mastered, and more and more as the child progresses from Form to Form. It is the essential point of P.U.S. teaching.' . . .

I hope I have been able to show you in a few small ways how the P.U.S. examination brings into focus the term's work for each pupil, and quite a lot about its value to you as teachers, but, in case the idea is fresh to you, I would like to close with the suggestion that there is yet further use to which the questions may be put — namely, as models for framing subjects for reports and essays to be set during the term. When I was teaching I used to find them an invaluable guide for this purpose, but not until I came to work on them from the issuing end, did I quite realise why. Now in them I see plainly a pattern of progress — a manner of approach and a demand appropriate to each age and subject, which is as necessary a characteristic of successful written work in exercise books as it is in examination papers, if we are to maintain our tradition that proper education eliminates exaggerated preparation for public examinations, that they really can be taken 'in the stride' of each suitable pupil, and that they need not be a hindrance to education in its fullest sense, but rather an integral part of it, providing a sense of achievement and a measure for growth. It is, as Charlotte Mason so simply states, 'our part to see that every child *knows* and *can tell*, whether by way of oral narrative or written essay', and this applies far beyond the limits of termly examination and indeed of the schoolroom itself.